

CASTLEMAINE

NATURALIST

MAY 1980

46

Pres: Mr G. Sitch
Sec: Mr S. Bruton
Treas: Mr L. Bransgrove
Newsletter: Mr G. Broadway

Wildflowers of the Castlemaine District

CRANBERRY HEATH - *Astroloma humifusum*

by Rita Mills

Cranberry Heath is a very widespread plant up to 30 cm high. In this district it is inclined to be prostrate, with small stiff leaves (up to 1 cm), which end in a prickly point.

The rich red, slightly curved, tubular flowers are beginning to appear among the leaves now. Flowering usually continues well into Winter.

Viewed under a magnifying glass, the 5 petal points are seen to be slightly "woolly".

In Spring, sweetish, succulent green berries appear under the loose mat of foliage.



General meetings of the club are held on the second Friday of each month at the Castlemaine Education Centre, S.E.C. building, Mostyn Street. Excursions are usually on the following Saturday or Sunday as arranged. Visitors are very welcome at both meetings and excursions.

CORREA STUDY

During the last three years, 2 research workers at LaTrobe University have been engaged in the collection of all known species of Correa from Queensland to Tasmania and West. Australia.

They have made a detailed study of the morphology and chemistry of the plants and plan to produce a brochure giving descriptions, colour photographs, and distribution maps of all the species. This should be of interest to all gardeners and horticulturalists, and especially to our president who admits to a weakness for the genus.

NIGHT VISION OF OWLS (Contributed)

Recent research in Britain on the Tawny Owl has shown that the vision of owls and humans is roughly similar.

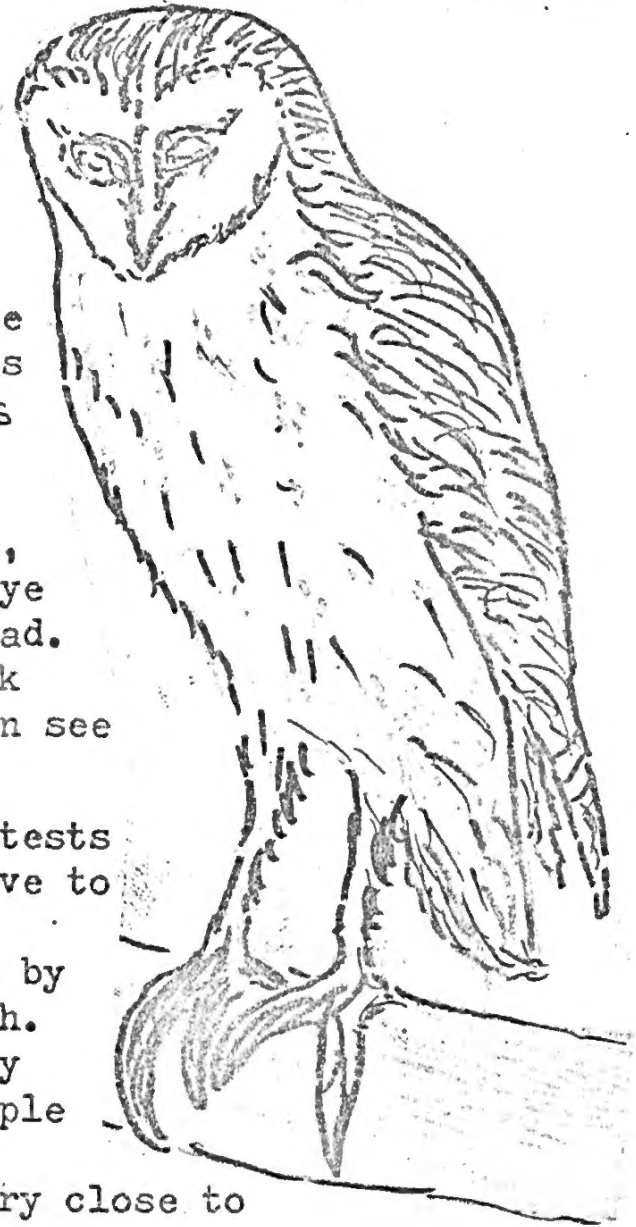
Owls are apparently characterised by flat faces and very large eyes. The first of these is a fallacy - the shape of the owl's skull is the same as other birds - it is the feathers on the face that give the flat look.

The eye of the owl is also smaller than it looks, and, unlike the ball-shaped human eye, is tubular. This means it cannot move its eye in the socket as we do, but must move its head. Its very flexible neck even allows it to look directly behind. Our eye wins in that we can see a much larger area.

No animal can see in complete darkness, and tests show that the owl is perhaps $2\frac{1}{2}$ times sensitive to light as humans. As the ability of normal human eyes to see in low light levels varies by a factor of 10 or more, this is not very much. A day at the beach would reduce our vision by this much, and it seems likely that some people can see better at night than some owls. This is not surprising for human eyes are very close to the theoretical limit.

The apparent superiority of the owl over humans at night is due to their superb hearing. Tests have shown that owls can swoop and catch their prey even in total darkness. Their hearing and sight are usually co-ordinated to catch prey, and it is significant that owls, like most night birds, depend on noisy food sources.

Other myths to be exploded are that owls can "see" infra-red rays, and that owls are blind in daylight. Tests have shown that the daylight vision of owls is about the same as, say, a pigeon, and is only slightly worse than ours.



At the campout held over the weekend of the 11th to 13th of April, by the Western Victorian Field Naturalists, our club delegates were Stan Bruton and Frank Meyer. The following is an extract from their report.

ALCOA were asked to change plans and locate their works away from public land required for a scientific reserve, to some of their own property slightly to the West where the problem of air pollution would be minimal as the prevailing South-West winds would take most of the air pollution out to sea.

A proposal to use Scarsdale as a dump for liquid toxic waste resisted. The authorities to be asked to find and institute alternative methods such as incineration to overcome the need to dump liquid waste.

Last year the Lands Department sprayed Acacia while birds were nesting, resulting in the destruction of many nests. It was resolved to make a strong protest and to try to stop the practice.

A proposal for Safari trips of special interest to Field Naturalists was adopted. Five percent discount was offered to be paid into the Cliff Beaglehole Fund

A printing of 1000 copies of a further publication of "Plants of Victoria" was launched at the meeting. The trust fund which has a bank credit of about \$5000 is to prepare and publish a check list of plants for the whole of Victoria.

The weather was perfect for the excursions which were held to Clifton Beach and Bay of Islands. On the Sunday a picnic was held at Melba Gully, about 3km West of Lavers Hill.

The weekend was hosted by the Timboon Field Naturalists Club.

(From the files of the Mount Alexander Mail, Aug 27, 1858)

A few days ago, I saw a remarkably fine specimen of the native bear, as it is called, though it resembles a species of marsupial sloth more than anything else. The animal was shot by Mr Collings Jnr., in the vicinity of Wattle Flat. It was about two feet and a half long (75 cm), and was covered with a thick coat of coarse fur. When brought down, the bear had two or three young ones in its pouch, but these were quickly devoured by the dog. The animal was remarkably tenacious of life, and showed signs of animation after it had twice received the contents of the gun. It is said that the specimen is much larger than those which were seen in the Melbourne Exhibition. The owner of the prize intends to have it preserved. (Contributed by Ray Bradfield)

CASTLEMAINE FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB PROGRAM

MEETINGS

Friday May 9 The Alps

Speaker : Mr E. Perkins
I/C supper at this meeting
Terry & Billy Collins

July 11 Birds

Speaker : Mr C. Burt

Notes from the April business meeting.

Photoflora : After paying for hall, advertising, etc. a small profit of \$14-78 was made.

Ansell Bus Lines of Wood Wood are organizing a tour of the Big Desert for F. Nats.

Adults only, limit of 9.

Meals provided. Bring sl.bag.

Cost \$140. Details from Sec.

May Observations

Early Nancy is sometimes reported in the last week in May. In this district last year it was much later.

Fungi : Watch for those which appear after the rain. Perhaps some specimens might be brought along to the June meeting.

Are there any birds nesting this month ?

What insects are to be found at present ? Many of course will not be in the adult stage.

There seem to be a number of Swan plants in Castlemaine. Do any of them play host to caterpillars of any sort ?

Has anyone observed platypus in Barker's Creek recently ?

from the "Mount Alexander Mail" a contribution from
Ray Bradfield

September 1. 1864.

At Woods Point, a ten-month old captive Platypus has laid eggs. These are soft and white. Mr Rumley, the gold receiver at Wood's Point, unfortunately threw away the eggs before they could be thoroughly examined, but it does seem to settle the point ...
THE PLATYPUS DOES LAY EGGS.

EXCURSIONS

Sat. May 10 To the Grant residence at Barker's Ck. Leader from the Ed. Centre is Mr F. Blake. Time 1.30 This is a birding expedition so bring binoculars and see how many we are able to spot.

June Excursion : Leader : Mr R Smart
The aim will be to locate fungi. Perhaps a suitable container for collecting and later making spore prints would be in order.

July Excursion : Leader : Marj Rilen
Guildford plateau and Sailors Falls. Geology and mineral springs, so bring camera, hammer, and drinking mug.

SAVE THESE TREES

Mr Ray Bradfield has recommended to the National Trust Landscape Cttee. that three local notable trees be noted for preservation. They are at Guildford, and two at Newstead.